

Liverpool, 10th February. 1810.

SIR,

I TAKE the liberty of addressing you, on a subject of great importance, that is at present under the consideration of his Majesty's Ministers.

I mean the renewal of the Act, passed in the last Session of Parliament, for prohibiting Distillation from Corn in the United Kingdom for a limited period, which will expire on the 4th March. On this subject, doubts are entertained by some, and particularly with regard to Ireland.

The advantages, that have resulted from this measure, to the country at large, and to the West India interests in particular, I am persuaded, have only to be explained, to insure general support and approbation.

The crops of Corn in the year 1808 throughout the United Kingdom were by all admitted to be deficient; this fact was confirmed by the smallness of the stock of old Corn that remained at the close of the last harvest, when old Wheat in particular brought prices seldom known. Fortunately the surplus of Oats in Ireland, which would otherwise have been consumed in the Irish Distilleries, afforded a large supply of Oatmeal for bread to the extensive and populous manufacturing districts in Lancashire, Yorkshire, and the West of Scotland, which lessened the consumption of Wheat, and prevented the prices of all kinds of Grain from advancing to still more exorbitant rates. The produce of last harvest scarcely reached an average crop; and from unfavourable weather in the Autumn, the quality was materially injured; in consequence, and notwithstanding that there has been during the Winter a very large importation of Foreign Corn, the prices of both Wheat and Barley are higher at present than they were at the same period last year, as appears by the average of Corn Returns for the kingdom—Wheat by 12s, and Barley by 6s per quarter; which strikingly confirms what I have advanced. In Ireland, last Spring, when expectations were generally entertained there, that the prohibition of Distillation from Corn would have been withdrawn in that part of the United Kingdom, the price of Oats advanced in the Dublin market, between the 4th February and the 6th of March, 8s 6d per barrel of 196 lb. equal to five Winchester bushels. It appears, by the returns from that market, that the highest price, on the 4th February, was 21s 6d, and on the 6th March 30s; in the end of that month this expectation was abandoned; in consequence, the prices returned to their former standard, the highest rate, on the 1st April, being 22s per barrel.

From these facts, it is evident, that had Distillation from Corn been allowed in Ireland last year, the prices would have been exorbitantly high, *since the expectation only* drove the price of Oats (the kind of Grain chiefly used for Distillation in Ireland) in the Dublin market, to the alarming price of 30s per barrel, equal to 48s per Winchester quarter, which would have been followed by a still more serious advance in those markets of this kingdom, that, in a great measure, depend on receiving supplies of this Grain from Ireland.

From this view of the subject, I am persuaded that the Landed Interest and Farmer must be satisfied that they have no injury to apprehend from the continuance of this salutary measure, as the present prices of Grain fully remunerate the growers in every part of the United Kingdom; but if a different opinion should any where exist, I beg to point out a clear and obvious remedy by which no class or description of His Majesty's subjects would be injured. At present there is a great importation of Foreign Corn into this kingdom from hostile countries, chiefly from France; this trade is carried on in *foreign ships* under licences, granted by his Majesty's Government, and the article must, unfortunately, be paid for, as I apprehend, *chiefly in specie*; our exports to these countries being very limited, as clearly appears by the rates of Exchange being more against England than can almost be recollected by the oldest merchant. In last month (January) the import into London alone of Foreign Wheat amounted to 142,379 quarters, of Oats to 39,562 quarters; valuing the first at 80s, and the last at 30s per quarter, *they amount to the large sum of £628,859 paid to our enemies for Corn in one month by London only; thus feeding their resources, and encouraging their agriculture, whilst complaints are made by some, that markets are wanted for the sale and consumption of our own growths*; since certainly to permit Foreign import as much implies a scarcity, as permitting Distillation from Corn would imply a surplus; which measures, if permitted at the same time, would be in direct contradiction to each other. If, then, it should be thought, that our growth and stocks of Corn are sufficient for our consumption, in place of again plunging the West India Planter into a renewed state of overwhelming

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distress, by putting an end to the use of Sugar in the Distilleries, let Government be requested to put a stop to the import of Foreign Corn by licence, and those markets now supplied in that manner, would then receive similar supplies of British and Irish growth, which would take off every surplus, and fully relieve those, if there are any who have cause to complain: the Irish Farmer, in particular, would then have access to the London market with his Oats, from which he has long been in a great degree excluded by the preference given to Foreign supplies: this is the great object to which, in my humble opinion, the Irish Members of Parliament ought and may direct their attention, with the happiest effects.

In this view of the subject, the interests of the great manufacturing body in the United Kingdom, as well as of the labouring poor, must go hand in hand with those of the West India Planters; it being of the first importance to all, that we should have, within ourselves, a well husbanded supply of food, and particularly bread, at rates, such as the prices and value of labour can afford to pay.

The claims of the West India Planters and Merchants on the Government, and country at large, for protection, are such as, I think, cannot be resisted: it must always be remembered, that confined to drawing all their supplies, to consuming British Manufactures, and employing British Shipping only, they have no markets for their produce but those of the United Kingdom to which they are imperatively restricted. Previous to the Distillation of Sugar being permitted, the prices of this article were reduced to so low an ebb, that the nett proceeds in England did not, upon an average, defray the expence of cultivation and manufacture in the West Indies, without returning one penny to the Planter for the use of his capital, the support of his family, or the payment of his debts; under these circumstances many were ruined, and all forced to contemplate the same fate, unless it could be averted by Legislative measures for their relief: at this period, too, their own growth of Sugar exceeding the consumption of the mother country, and almost without aid from export vents, the Danish Islands were taken possession of, and their crops admitted to be imported, for home consumption, on the same terms with those of our own colonies; thus increasing a supply before too large, and adding, if possible, to the distress of the British Sugar Planter. Other Foreign colonies have since been conquered; their produce is more than adequate to any Foreign demand hitherto experienced in our markets; and as it must be sold for export only, before a cask of British Plantation Sugar can be disposed of in that way, the Foreign will be first taken off, and in consequence the home market is the only one that can be said to be open to our own Planter.

It was in this state of distress that Government found our West India Planters, when its attention became directed to their case; the subject underwent a long and minute investigation in Parliament—the facts were fully made out by the strongest evidence, and Distillation from Corn was prohibited, as a measure of wisdom, precaution, and relief. The result proves the wisdom of the measure;—the landed interest has not been injured—the crops of Corn have been husbanded, (a matter at all times most important, but particularly during a period of such extended warfare)—the Farmer has been fully remunerated for his labour—the Manufacturer, and labouring poor, have supplies of bread, in a certain degree, secured to them, at comparatively reasonable prices; and the West India Planter, partaking in the general benefit, has also cause to rejoice. The revenue too, I believe, has been fully protected, and with a continuance of the measure may, I am informed, be still more improved.

I trust, that without going into more minute particulars, I have made it out to the satisfaction of every person, that it is highly necessary, the prohibition of Distillation from Corn, throughout the United Kingdom, ought to be continued, at least, until the fate of the ensuing crop is fully ascertained.

MERCATOR.

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